

Small bowel

Any small bowel in the radiation field will cause you to have diarrhoea, possibly with some cramping abdominal pains. Anti-diarrhoeal medication can help in this situation. This should pass off within a month of completing radiotherapy. It is unusual to experience any permanent damage.

Ovaries

The ovaries will be within the radiation beam and are very sensitive. There will be no effect if you have already gone through the menopause. If you have not, radiotherapy will stop the ovaries from working and cause an early menopause. This means you will be unable to have children and will no longer produce the female hormones. HRT can be discussed with you if desired.

Parking during Treatment

You will be given a parking permit to use in one of the radiotherapy parking spaces; this must be returned at the end of the course of radiotherapy.

Post Radiotherapy

If you need any assistance after radiotherapy has finished, please contact:

Macmillan Radiographer 01803 654273
Gynaecology Nurse Specialist 01803 654627

For further information there are booklets available

FREE OF CHARGE FROM MACMILLAN Freephone 0808 808 00 00
(Mon-Fri 9am-8pm)

Torbay and South Devon 
NHS Foundation Trust



**PATIENT
INFORMATION**

Cancer of the Vulva

**Radiotherapy information for Torbay
Hospital patients**

The following information is not intended to be comprehensive, but should give you an idea of what to expect during and soon after your radiotherapy treatment here at Torbay.

General Principles of radiotherapy

Radiotherapy means the delivery of powerful X-ray beams to destroy cancer cells. This is carefully planned to a defined area of the body containing cancer cells or where a cancer has been removed.

The type of radiotherapy you will receive is called 'external beam radiotherapy' using techniques called conformal radiotherapy, intensity Modulated radiotherapy (IMRT) and Image Guided Radiotherapy (IGRT). This means that radiation is delivered from a machine (linear accelerator) which generates X-rays. Radiation is only present when the machine is switched on, so you are not radioactive after your treatment.

Arrangements for your radiotherapy

It is very important that we can target the radiotherapy as accurately as possible. A CT scan with you lying in the treatment position locates the area to be treated.

You will have some small permanent marks (tattoos) placed onto your skin (with your consent) which are used to help reproduce your position accurately during treatment. If you do not wish to have these permanent marks then the radiographers will discuss other options plus the additional responsibilities on your part to ensure temporary marks are not lost.

Photographs/electronic images will also be acquired, with your consent. These will be kept in your notes or stored electronically.

Verification: A further image may be taken on the treatment set to confirm your position prior to commencing treatment.

Treatment details

Treatment is given daily, Monday-Friday but not routinely at weekends.

You will receive either 20 or 25 treatments in total each lasting approximately 15 minutes. Your doctor will decide with you which treatment option is suitable for you. You will need to be in the same

position each day for your treatment as you were for your CT scan. The radiographers will use your tattoos to adjust your position as above.

Using the linear accelerator, x-ray images will be taken daily (IGRT) during treatment to check on your treatment position.

Side effects

Radiotherapy may affect some of your normal tissues in the pelvic area. You may feel tired, however, nausea is unusual and you will not lose your hair. The skin, bladder, rectum (lower bowel), small bowel and ovaries may be affected as follows:

Skin

The skin will become sore and reddened towards the end of the course of radiotherapy. E45 cream can be applied to any reddened areas. The skin may break down in parts, particularly in the skin creases; you will be advised regarding specific gels that can help this and your skin will be monitored closely during treatment.

Rectum

A large area will receive a high dose. This usually results in a temporary inflammation, causing you to pass small, frequent motions. Occasionally blood is passed. Medication can be given to ease these symptoms during treatment and they should pass of within a month of completing radiotherapy. In rare instances the rectum is damaged permanently and surgery may be required. The anus itself may become inflamed causing pain when passing motions. You will be advised regarding creams to help with this. Constipation must be avoided so do let the radiographers know if this happens. Rarely the treatment causes the anus to be prone to leakage.

Bladder

A small area of the bladder will receive a high dose of radiation, resulting in irritation of the bladder, causing you to pass urine more frequently. Let us know if this happens as we need to exclude an infection. There are some treatments that can ease these symptoms which should pass off within a month of completing Radiotherapy. Rarely, the bladder is damaged permanently resulting in the passage of small amounts of blood and an inability to hold onto much urine.